

SARPA Newsletter No.29

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Black Five 45407 at Aberystwyth. Photo: Trevor Owen

Chairman's Message

There are some rumblings on the horizon which could well if they pan out in the right way change the attitude and perception of the powers that be to rail and rail investment. The worldwide price of oil will only go up and up as this resource is now in decline: a few frustrated truck drivers cannot change this irrefutable fact no matter how hard they blow their horns, and public opinion was stronger against what many perceived as an "oil war" in Iraq, than it was in favour of fuel protests. Darling's rail review has the potential to get things moving better in the rail industry – New Labour couldn't make it worse or could they? In a few weeks we should find out if Mr Blair & Co have woken up to reality and left dogma behind them.

Transferring rail powers to the Assembly is a positive thing in my opinion, if the AM's use that power over transport generally wisely. All focus will now be on Cardiff so lets get out there and educate these AM's! I'm sure there is plenty of kudos and political mileage in improving rail for the benefit of your constituents now it is something you have their mitts on, but remember dear AM's you will also get the blame if things go wrong! The cost of road projects is going out of

control - £40 million for the Llanymynech/Pant bypass is being quoted, that's £10 million a mile! So the value for money of rail is getting a lot better now the West Coast Main Line modernisation fiasco is nearing the end. Lets be positive about rail now and shout its benefits and not sulk about "rising costs".

From the transport-shopping list we find in a cost comparison that reinstating one of the loops at Dovey Junction will cost the same as:

- Two months worth of subsidy to support a North to South Air link in Wales
- that would be used by a handful of businessmen and civil servants
- Construct about half a mile of the A40 Cross Hands to Haverfordwest up grade to dual carriageway.
- Blaze an amazing quarter of a mile of the A483 Llanymynach/Pant bypass.

Source: derived from Welsh Assembly Government Official Publications.

So here's my Assembly challenge: you will be getting powers in the next 18 months or so over all transport modes in Wales. What will you use it do? More road building for vehicles that can't run due to fuel shortages in twenty years time or to make a real difference to the transport of Wales by investing in its underdeveloped rail network to unlock its potential?

Fifty years ago this month, British Railways introduced a daily through train from Aberystwyth to London to great success lets have some vision for today!

Gareth Marston Newtown June 2004.

News in Brief

Aberystwyth

The Welsh Assembly Government is to establish its Mid Wales Office in the town from 2007, and redistribute some public sector jobs from Cardiff as well as a creating some new ones at as yet undetermined location. Key to this policy of spreading the benefit of government throughout the land will be communication links. Amongst other benefits this should increase the pressure and justification for an hourly service on our line.

Will the Assembly act and have in place an improved hourly service on the line to Shrewsbury or will we see lots of stories in the press post 2007 as the civil servants complain of poor transport infrastructure?

Machynlleth

Gone is the captive fleet of 11 green Class 158's maintained at Machynlleth depot. All Arriva Trains Wales Class 158 fleet are now in a common user pool and our line is now operated by any of the fleet - introducing lots of different liveries. Many people consider the interior of the ex Wales & West Canton based Units to

be superior to the ex Central Trains ones.

Powys

The county council is concerned over the time lost and the cost of its officials driving all over the county to meetings and is producing a Transport plan for employees. Some officials are probably spending more time behind a wheel of a car and sitting in meetings than doing any productive work.

If common sense had prevailed in the 1960's the county would still have an internal rail network and its officials could travel to meetings whilst doing some productive work on the train. Yet another "unforeseen" effect of the Beeching era, Local Authority inefficiency and extra costs to the hard-pressed Council Tax payer?

Assembly to get powers over Rail

It seems likely that with time to go before the next general election that the Transport (Wales) Bill will become an Act of Parliament in the next year or so. The Bill will give the Assembly power over all transport modes within Wales including Rail and give it the ability to direct the SRA (and god knows it needs direction), directly fund improvements and integrate transport modes. Of great interest but hidden away in the detail it seems that the current Local Authority responsibility for Local Transport Plans (LTP's) will be passed on to four regional Boards made up of Local Authority members, Passenger bodies and transport operators.

Arriva Standard Pattern Timetable

May also saw the response from Arriva to its consultation on its Standard Pattern Timetable proposal, SARPA's being one of over 70 responses received. Basically our response was positive and generally welcoming as a move in the right direction. However we did point out the need for a commuter train into Shrewsbury in the morning; members views that connections to Crewe/ Manchester at Shrewsbury were the major priority not Chester/ Cardiff; the general need for a more frequent service; and additional rolling stock. Arriva has made a number of changes based on consultation in other parts of Wales. Its original proposals for our line remain basically unaltered with the possible exception of considering additional stops between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton: possibly at Shifnal.

They declared their support to working towards an hourly service over the Cambrian Main line, and again suggested the period of the ERTMS trial as a good time to aim for, providing funding could be secured from outside their current budget set by the SRA.

To recap, benefits from December 2005 are:

- A slightly later first UP departure without loss of connections.
- Second UP departure strengthened to four coaches from Machynlleth. (3 out of 8 UP weekday services now scheduled for four coaches).
- New DOWN departure from Shrewsbury at 0732 giving earlier arrival into Aberystwyth (0918) and better connections onto the Coast (Barmouth two hours earlier, Pwllheli four hours earlier) also allowing limited opportunities from the Coast to Aberystwyth (one good connection each way now).
- 1732 from Shrewsbury strengthened to four coaches on Weekdays (3 out of 8 DOWN services now scheduled for four coaches).

Newtown

April saw armed police arrest a sleeping man carrying a ball bearing gun on a train. The “fugitive” was involved at an incident at a bus stop in Llanon, Ceredigion some three hours earlier.

Punctuality on the Up

Arriva Trains are now regularly hitting the high 80%'s and low 90%'s for punctuality on our line. The target is 93%. This is welcome news and carries on a trend that's been improving since Wales and Border Trains took over from Central Trains. Chances for further improvement do not look great without a lot of further infrastructure capacity improvements, with the exception of the new fourth through platform at Wolverhampton currently under construction and due to be commissioned in September.

Of course idiotic own goals such as happened on the 10th May when Network Rail ran a slow (40mph maximum speed) weed killing train onto the line in daylight, delaying service trains by over half an hour, do not help.

All change in September

September this year will see a timetable change for the entire West Coast Main line as 125mph running and full fleet service of Pendolinos happens for Virgin. Will all the pain be worth it? A total recast of their West Midland services sees the point of change for travelling to London change. Our trains will no longer officially connect at Wolverhampton with Euston bound services. London bound passengers will have to change at Birmingham New St where there will be a 12 minute connection for London. Generally journey times to London will speed up by 20 or so minutes. On the return passengers will again have to change at Birmingham, with a twenty five minute wait. Journey times will be roughly the same as now, though many regulars have pointed out that they were in the habit of taking the previous departure from Euston to ensure connections were met, so that in theory no change is perhaps a half hour gain in practice. So speeded up

journeys to London come at a price of having to change at New St. Improvement or not? Many members feel strongly that New St should not be the place of change to London and we are lobbying on this point.

However this summer sees untold engineering work on the West Coast Main Line in preparation for September, with numerous blockades and bus replacements. SARPA's advice is to travel to Birmingham New St and change stations there to Moor St (a four-minute walk) and use Chiltern Railways service into Marylebone, if faced with a bus. Please triple check times and make sure your ticket is valid for this route before travelling.

Of course if the UK had progressive transport policies a brand new high speed rail line could have and should have been built for less than the total cost of West Coast upgrade. Once more the politicians let the nation down and cost the taxpayer more.

Meet the Minister

A special mention to committee member Angus Eichoff who represented us on a delegation lead by Shrewsbury MP Paul Marsden to see Transport Minister Kim Howells MP in May. Amongst other things Angus discovered that no one in London knew where the Ministry of Transport was, Kim Howells thought Beeching did a good job and also thinks no one lives north of Merthyr Tydfil!

Draw your own conclusions!

Consultations

Due to the increasing number of consultations floating around on all matters, SARPA has formed a consultation sub committee consisting of Gareth Marston, Angus Eichoff & Tony Burton. The group will identify and collate responses on behalf of SARPA. All members are welcome to contribute and help draw attention to things.

Arriva Trains management musical chairs

In a big shake up from what was inherited from Wales & Borders, James Widowson has moved to Chester with responsibility for all of North Wales, and Tony O'Donovan is back at Machynlleth as Customer Service Manager for the Cambrian.

ERTMS: What is it and why is it important to your rail journey?

Remember this? The ultra modern signalling system that was to be tried out on the Cambrian first. A Press Release from the SRA in May stated that the system is now on course to be tried over the whole of the Cambrian System west of Sutton Bridge Junction in 2007.

E stands for “European. . . “ Before you turn off, here's why it is important. It could provide the catalyst for a more frequent service between Shrewsbury , Machynlleth, Aberystwyth and Pwllheli.

R T stands for “ . . . Rail Traffic. . . “ [as well as many older buses in London]

The single line system, from Sutton Bridge Junction in Shrewsbury to Dyfi Junction west of Machynlleth and then onward via the two limbs to the coast, relies on a radiobased token block signalling system. This is controlled from Machynlleth and will be due for replacement in a few years.

MS stands for “ ... Management System” [as well as a distressing human condition]

We all know that this is the techie bit. Modern technology; clever stuff, does it work? Today (Wednesday 19th May 2004) the SRA (or Strategic Rail Authority) published its proposals for a national trial of the ERTMS on the Cambrian Lines. BBC Radio Shropshire carried an interview with an SRA representative all about it which went out at around 07:15 hours on the same day. The SRA rep was Jonty Alone and the BBC interviewer was Eric Smith. The key points that I noted from the interview are listed here:-

1. The system is expected to be installed on a trial basis on the Cambrian lines.
2. Most of the investment is 'in train'. So the signalling is, as it were, in the cab.
3. Each train which relies on the system needs to be equipped with the 'in cab' kit.
4. The cost of equipping each train at present is estimated as œ£250,000 per train.
5. This cost is seen as too high. Work to reduce this is starting now.

6. If these trials are successful then national 'roll-out' will follow from 2008.
7. European law obliges us to make improvements [not detailed in the interview].

The detailed technical explanation of exactly how the system works is not attempted here.

As with any new and radical development, there is an element of risk involved. There will inevitably be some changes to services as this experiment progresses. The Association will keep pressing the operating company, now Arriva Trains Wales, to respect their obligations under the franchise and, in a spirit of co-operation, to make the most of opportunities for improved services that may and should arise.

The interview also included reference to whether this system is already in use in other parts of the world. The interviewee did not take this bait, so, dear members, this is your opportunity to write a short piece about your overseas rail experience - especially if it involves the ERTMS!

Roger Goodhew 19/05/2004

Chairman of the Rail Passengers Council Wales

Colin Foxall CBE is to be appointed to the position of RPC Wales chairman for the next four years.

Commenting on Mr Foxall's appointment, national RPC chairman, Stewart Francis, said: *"I'm very pleased to welcome Colin's appointment. He brings strong experience of the commercial and public sectors as well as senior management knowledge and I am sure he will be a great advocate for rail users in Wales. I look forward to the contribution that Colin will undoubtedly make to championing the interests of rail users, both in the committee and at a national level through his role on the Council."*

Colin Foxall said: *"I am looking forward to working with the staff and members of RPC Wales. Together I hope we shall be an effective voice for the passenger and also play a full part in the development of rail strategy at a very important time for the railways."*

Mr Francis concluded: *"The RPC is determined that passengers' views should be at the heart of the decision-making process and I'm sure that Colin will ensure that passengers have a strong voice to speak up on their behalf. His appointment is good news for effective consumer representation in Wales."*

Cambrian Coast Express in retrospect

The image of the Cambrian in Steam days was the Cambrian Coast Express (CCE): chocolate and cream coaches, immaculately turned out Manor Class locomotives hauling it and sunny skies of the 1950's "Indian summer of the railways". A daily named through train from London Paddington to Aberystwyth with a portion for the coast with a restaurant car and first class accommodation. Had it existed forever and been taken away by the evil forces that tried to destroy the railway in the 1960's? A symbol of the greatness of the railways providing a much-missed facility?

Well the answer is sort of. Back in Cambrian Railways days there were through coaches from Aberystwyth to London Euston that started in the 1880's, courtesy of the London North Western Railway via shunts at Welshpool, Shrewsbury and Stafford. A complete through train got going in the 1920's with the name Cambrian Coast Express appearing under Great Western auspicious and then as a summer Saturday only train, carrying holidaymakers to the Welsh Coast avoiding Shrewsbury via the curve. Various it sometimes did not run, occasionally there were Fridays when it ran, sometimes it ran without its name and was interrupted by World War Two. It restarted after the war on Saturdays and continued under British Railways. Then somewhere in Western Region headquarters in Swindon a brainwave was hatched. Under some freedom from the British Railways Board a number of named through trains with carriages painted in old GWR colours were slipped through the net. It may have been cocking a snook at BR conformity, or post war austerity, but somehow the summer Saturday holiday train became a year round daily one.

The "classic" CCE was born on Monday 12th June 1954. With some minor variations this format survived through to the end of steam. The UP departure left Aberystwyth between 1000 & 1100 and consisted of seven coaches* including restaurant car and first class coaches, calling only at the "major" stations on the line including Moat Lane Junction, it stopped at Shrewsbury station before continuing to London Paddington, taking around seven hours for its trip. The DOWN service followed a similar pattern forming one of the fixed departures to the West Midlands with a similar seven hour trip to the Welsh coast. The 1958 summer timetable saw the UP & DOWN service cross on the double track section between Buttington Junction and Welshpool if on time, though east of Shrewsbury was more common and so it continued till March 1967. One of the more contentious parts of the Reshaping of Britain's Railways report was the declaration of a number of main lines as "duplicate" routes to be downgraded or closed - Beeching went after main as well as branch lines. The former GWR route from Paddington to Birkenhead was deemed "duplicate" and all through traffic on it was to

cease. Though only “duplicate” at Wolverhampton, Birmingham & Chester, the needs of the other numerous communities along the route and those that fed into them were completely ignored. Even a city the size of Birmingham was deemed only needing one main line station – a decision that we have all come to regret with the congested New St blocking the nations rail arteries.

BR continued with the summer Saturday's only through train to London Euston now with less than reliable diesel haulage, and then in the mid 80's an effort was made to revive the CCE. With the backing of the Development Board for Rural Wales a new daily through train started in summer 1986. Now it left Aberystwyth at 0730 and the return working left London at 1540. Vaguely aimed at a “business” market, journey time was now just over five hours with electric haulage from Wolverhampton. It was five coaches in length west of Shrewsbury and characterized by annoying waits at Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton whilst engines and coaches were added/taken off. The UP train and Sunday workings were always well loaded; despite this however with a recession and pressure from Government to make itself “profitable” ready for privatisation, BR axed something which was an operating anomaly in April 1991. The summer Saturday trains disappeared as well leaving the Cambrian for the first time in over a century without any through service to London.

The return of through London workings is wished for by many though never an aim of SARPA's. It's worth reviewing the past to see what we can learn and consider options for the future. The 1950's working was ideal for its time, with journey times taking nearly all day and competitor modes more or less non-existent. It made sense to have mid morning departures and late afternoon arrivals - it took all day anyway so why fuss? Why not get up at a reasonable time and arrive at a reasonable time? It more or less had the London market sown up. With different operating practices and resources more plentiful, two dedicated rakes of coaches were acceptable and they weren't expected to be flogged to death 16 hours a day either. The 1980's working showed how times had changed; firstly the times of the train were more determined by modern operating practices than demand. Two rakes could not be spared so the UP working was early and the DOWN working late so as not to under utilize stock, which was used for the rest of the day on the main line. The DOWN working was little more than an empty stock movement with some passengers onboard. It was also increasingly operationally inconvenient with fixed length formations favoured over older ways. With journey times by connections reduced and all trains going to somewhere with London connections (not the case in the 1950's) other options were open to passengers to travel at other times, and it probably carried only 50% of the market at most. Indeed travel today and you can spot quite easily passengers for London travelling on all the services with no particular concentration on any particular one, with journey times to Aberystwyth due to be reduced

this September to four and a half hours it will be possible to leave Aberystwyth at 0930 have a business meeting in London and return the same day! This spread of potential journey times and the modern 24hr society makes picking a single time for a train to run increasingly hard. The real value of any re-introduced CCE would probably lie more in publicity value than anything else: the fact that our line skirts the southern edge of the Snowdonia National Park is kept a national secret, tourist rather than business traveller? Seasonal?

Indeed is there any justification for restoring through trains? As anyone who follows the “close the branch line brigades” toddler strop tactics knows one of the most compelling arguments against branch line closure is the fact that substantial numbers of passengers on main lines come off connecting trains. An oft-quoted figure is that 20- 25% of rural passengers are in fact travelling from/to London. With numbers on the Cambrian main line approaching 600,000 per annum there could be 120,000 to 150,000 London passengers travelling each year, which equates to around 200 passengers travelling in each direction daily, albeit spread over 8 trains. Obviously these figures need proper verification, but there would seem to be some indication, especially if passenger numbers continue to grow, that some sort of discernable market is there. These passengers deserve a lot better than changing at Birmingham New St with its poor environment, poor information and distressing last minute platform changes.

The real obstacle to improved services to London and anywhere else for that matter is the political climate: if public transport was truly valued and supported things would be different. A town the size of Shrewsbury should easily have an express Intercity service to London every two hours and services from its connecting lines including ours would be coordinated to connect into this service.

Gareth Marston

* For much of the time the train was formed of Aberystwyth and Pwllheli portions, which divided on the down journey at Machynlleth, and were joined at Dovey Junction on the up train. The Aberystwyth portion included the Restaurant Car.

Editor



The old order—the down Cambrian Coast Express at Moat Lane, 24th April 1962. The same train at Machynlleth is shown on p.17. Photo: Denis Bates



The new order—a Voyager at Wolverhampton 5th April 2004. Photo: Denis Bates

SARPA's submission to the Parliamentary Transport Select Committee meeting held in Shrewsbury on 21 April

A good meeting with the select committee, with many issues being raised. Although the session was primarily supposed to be about rural railways, there was the inevitable lengthy discussion about services from Shrewsbury to London. Also the usual tosser who got up and said how we should concrete over all the railways and replace them with dedicated bus routes etc etc! The Committee did not seem very impressed!

Committee made the point that they are open to submissions from the general public, with their level of interest in such things being determined largely by the quality of the submission. If anyone feels they have anything to add to what I have said, their email address is :- Parliamentary Transport Committee <transcom@parliament.uk> or The Clerk to the Transport Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

1. Local Issues Arising from a Dysfunctional Railway

1.1 We have a situation arising on the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth line in that the morning service to Shrewsbury no longer can run as a commuter train, indeed this has been the case for several years now. The 0730 departure from Aberystwyth calls at Welshpool at 0854, with arrival in Shrewsbury at 0919, too late for anyone wishing to use the train to commute to work. Formerly the case was that this train called at Welshpool at 0828, with arrival in Shrewsbury at 0853, which gave people just about enough time to reach their place of work from the station in everything ran to time.

1.2 We are led to understand that this train was very overcrowded on its journey into Shrewsbury and that the operator incurred penalties for this. To alleviate this problem, the final solution was to alter the time of the train so that it can no longer be used by anyone travelling to work or college. Meanwhile, the A458 main road from Welshpool to Shrewsbury becomes ever more busy at this time in the morning.

1.3 Of course, this method of approaching the problem is not in the best interests of business development. One daily commuter is worth more than a hundred leisure travellers and the Cambrian line as a whole has experienced passenger growth of around 7% every year since 1995. The main line to Aberystwyth now carries more than 500,000 passengers a year, with the Coast Line to Pwllheli rather more because of the school trains which run on that

section. Clearly there is a growing market for passenger train travel in Mid Wales and the Borders.

1.4 There have been proposals to upgrade the service to Aberystwyth to an hourly one. However, these ideas have stalled because of the insufficient number of loops on the single line where trains can pass each other. Several of these were removed by British Railways during the period 1960-1990. Re-instatement is necessary to provide sufficient flexibility in the event of late running trains. A feasibility study was carried out into rebuilding the passing loop at Dovey Junction and money is said to have been allocated by the Welsh Assembly Government for the work to be done. More than a year down the line there is much confusion as to what is actually going to happen and the service remains two hourly.

1.5 Moreover, an upgraded service would require additional trains to run the service. We understand that at present, all the Arriva Trains services between Birmingham and Aberystwyth; Birmingham and Chester and on the Cambrian coast line to Pwllheli are provided by no more than 11 diesel units comprising two coaches each.

2 Underlying Causes

2.1 The underlying causes of these situations are the arcane and dysfunctional nature of the UK railway system since privatisation. Indeed the lack of change and inability to tackle these problems has meant that Labour's stated government policy of improving the standard of passenger services and placing more freight on the railway, has been rather lacking in its execution

2.2 The trains we use in the UK are by and large leased by the operators from Rolling Stock Companies, themselves owned by big banks. The class 158 diesel units used on the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth line are owned by Porterbrook Leasing, itself owned by the Royal Bank of Scotland. These companies make huge profits at the expense of the taxpayer, who subsidises the train services. The cost of hiring a 158 unit of 2 carriages is around £250,000 per annum, which includes maintenance. British Rail built these units in the early 1990s at a cost to the taxpayer of around 1.5 million each, so the unfortunate UK taxpayer is having to pay for these trains twice. A cost comparison with steam traction indicates that major overhauls for preserved steam locomotives cost around £100,000 apiece today, so clearly there is some profiteering going on here. No way are these units as expensive to maintain as heritage steam traction!

2.3 Of course the implications of such high costs for rolling stock are clear. It is better for an operator to retime an overcrowded train in the hope that people will not use it than to add more vehicles because this is

more expensive. The rolling stock leasing market has been described as the "big success story of privatisation" but for whom? Certainly not the end user who has to put up with overcrowding, or trains at inconvenient times. The present structure is obviously a barrier to business growth here when clearly there is an increasing demand for rail travel.

2.4 The safety situation on rail does not help either. On the Cambrian line from Shrewsbury we have the same safety standards (at huge expense) as the main trunk routes. Lately there has been the installation on Train Protection Warning System (TPWS) on the Cambrian, despite the last major accident which caused fatalities being in 1921(Abermule). It is true to say that much of this has been a knee jerk reaction to the Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield derailments but without proper thought given to local needs. and whether the expenditure required will bring the desired benefits.

3 Renewals and Reopenings

3.1 It is clear that in order to cater for continued growth on the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth line, new investment is required. This would provide for re-instatement of passing loops where needed and restore double track sections which were removed in the 1960s. New rolling stock would be required, either by cascading vehicles from other areas or by building new, to provide for a service with increased frequency. Ideally, there should be an hourly service to Aberystwyth and provision of a half hourly service between Shrewsbury and Newtown. Some industry sources put the percentage of traffic carried by rail on this latter section as being as high as 20% under present conditions.

3.2 Now that Wales has a modicum of self-government, it would seem essential there there should be an efficient a quick means of access to the capital by public transport. Under present circumstances, this is clearly not happening where Mid-Wales is concerned; indeed it is difficult to think of another European country or region where communications with its capital are so poor.

3.3 To this end it would be desirable to reopen the link via Llanidloes, Builth and Brecon to reach Cardiff. This would not only give journey opportunities to people who are at present not served by rail at all but make possible rail travel between Shrewsbury and those places. In addition, people living those parts of Mid-Wales would benefit by having new job opportunities in Cardiff and Newport by way of commuting as those South Wales cities would be reachable in well under two hours.

3.4 In the period since 1980, the French have built more or less their entire TGV network of high speed rail lines. At a conference in Shrewsbury in July 2003 the keynote speaker, Adrian Lyons of the Railway Forum showed a

map of high speed railway lines in Europe. The only part of this network in the UK was the short section between the Channel Coast and London, itself not fully open even yet. Therefore, to propose a single line of railway with a line speed of 80-90mph and linking Mid-Wales to the regional capital, would not seem to be asking for the moon.

3.4 Admittedly all these proposals will cost a great deal of money but it would be cash well spent. Under the present circumstances since privatisation, the fragmentation of the rail industry has meant that untold sums of money are being wasted to provide a profit for operators and service providers. Assuming that the treasury will still be prepared to spend on the railways at present levels, solving the problems of industry structure will pay huge dividends. Money could be available for capital projects which is at present wasted on revenue subsidy. A recent newspaper report put the subsidy to Virgin Trains at over £300m.

4 Conclusions

4.1 The fragmented nature of the industry needs to end. There needs to be a return to a vertically integrated structure of the railway system, preferably with the same organisation responsible for running the trains as owns the infrastructure.

4.2 Ideally, the organisation should have a similar status to the BBC, with a charter, so as to be free of political interference as much as possible whilst being recognised as providing a public service.

4.3 The nature of the competition needs to be acknowledged. When the railways had a monopoly of mechanised transport, the competition was between different railway companies as to who provided the better service. Nowadays, the competition faced by rail transport is between modes. The choice is now whether to travel by car, long distance bus, train or aeroplane. The low cost airlines probably offer the most serious threat to long distance trunk rail services. So there should be an informed debate as to whether there should be competition between rail operators or whether this is now counter productive.

4.4 Money saved from providing revenue subsidy and profit for operators and leasing companies should be diverted to provide capital investment for the future and develop the network.

4.5 At local level, efforts should be made to enable people to use the train to get to work in order to relieve pressure on road transport. Without doubt, commuting does bring benefits to local communities in that they can sustain a population far greater than the number of local jobs would allow. This could have especial benefit in low wage areas like Mid-Wales. There are many towns in the Home Counties which would surely not be as prosperous

were it not for the existence of a rail route to London and provision of commuter trains.

4.6 The provision of new and better services would enable people living in quite rural areas to live an urban lifestyle. Already on the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth line, journeys by train are cheaper and quicker than travel by car. Quick, frequent trains have the nature of shrinking the distance between quite small towns, making them seem more "joined up". For what is Greater London itself than a collection of villages which have become more enjoined?

Angus Eickhoff



The points at Aberystwyth after repair—in time for the visit of the Black 5.



Above: Central Inn sign, Aberystwyth.

Below: Down CCE with 7823 at Machynlleth, 24th April 1962. Photos: Denis Bates



The upper picture on previous page:

The former Inn sign from the Central Hotel in Terrace Road, Aberystwyth. The picture shows No.7808 in Great Western livery, on the Cambrian Coast Express. It is a good likeness, obviously done from a photograph. However, are all the details correct — Great Western in full on the tender sides; the tender height and rear of the sides; headboard for GWR era? The coach looks more GW than BR.

SARPA MONTHLY MEETINGS. 2003-4

Meetings for 2004

Please double check. Dates, venues, times correct as of going to print (June 2004).

May be subject to change.

Month	Day	Time	Venue
July	Saturday 3 rd	1130	Cambrian Hotel, Aberystwyth
August	Tuesday 3 rd	1915	Wynnstay Hotel, Machynlleth.
September	Saturday 4 th	1115	AGM Plas Dolerw, Newtown.
October	Tuesday 5 th	1915	Pinewood Tavern, Welshpool.
November	Tuesday 2 nd	1930	Hobbs Room, Library, Shrewsbury
December	Tuesday 7 th	1900	Bell Hotel, Newtown.

Contributions from people who can't attend are more than welcome.

Oswestry: an autotrain for Gobowen. January 1962. Photo: Denis Bates.



WANT TO JOIN SARPA?

Please complete the form beneath and send with cheques to Treasurer Ivor Morris at the address beneath. The membership year runs from January to December. The membership fee is £5.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

- SARPA will lobby for better rail services.
- Act as a watchdog to safeguard the lines future.
- Meet in public once a month.

All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.

The majority of our expenditure goes towards the cost of publishing and distributing our newsletters. We subscribe to the Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation (£10 for 2003/2004), Transport 2000's Platform campaign and occasionally pay for room hire. Any surplus is held as an emer-

Name(s)
Address:

gency fund for the future. None of the officers gain financially in any way from SARPA.

I / we would like to join SARPA.
Please delete as appropriate.

SARPA: www.paradox-it.co.uk/sarpa

Useful Addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

WB4, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Road, Cardiff CF24 0SU
Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

RPC Wales:

Secretary, St. David's House, Wood Street, Cardiff CF10 1ES

Tel 029 2022 7247

Email: info.wales@railpassengers.org.uk

Networkrail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

Central Trains Limited

Central Trains Limited, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB

Tel. 0121 654 1200

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH

Tel. 0870 789 1234

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call:

0870 9000 773

OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

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E-mail angus.metal@telco4u.net

The position of secretary is currently vacant,

if anyone wishes to fulfil that role or become active within the committee please contact Gareth Marston.